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6/15/03 Corps, Coast Guard set month-end open houses

By JACK STOREY/The Evening News

SAULT STE. MARIE - For separate reasons, the Soo Locks and the Coast Guard's Base Sault will both hold elaborate open houses the weekend of June 27-28.

A popular event, the Engineer's Day open house at the Soo Locks comes with a special significance to civil engineers this year. In special ceremonies scheduled during the day on June 28, the 60th anniversary of the remarkable construction of the MacArthur Lock will be observed.

As is customary on Engineer's Day, the inner Soo Locks gates will be opened for visitors from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Anyone may tour limited areas of the Locks Administration Building and the MacArthur Lock during those hours.

Area Engineer Stan Jacek said the Corps pulled out a few more stops for this particular Engineer's Day. He indicated the Corps work boat basin and the large derrick barge Paul Bunyan off Water Street will also be open to public tours during the day.

He said the Corps is also dispatching its large dredge and tug combination from Duluth for display at the Locks on June 28.

The day's festivities will include a formal program commemorating the 60th anniversary of the MacArthur Lock Project in 1943. For the occasion, the Corps has arranged for concerts through the day by an Army band and an aerial flyover by military aircraft to punctuate the observance.

During the short program scheduled for 11 a.m. Lt. Col. Thomas Magness, Detroit District Engineer will present a commemorative plaque to Doug Mackie, president of Great Lakes Dredge and Dock Co. the prime contractor on the MacArthur Lock construction job.

In another program scheduled for the same day, the new Corps survey vessel Bufo will be formally dedicated by Lt. Col. Magness and Fr. Ted Brodeur of St. Mary's Pro-Cathedral.

An impressive project by any measure, the MacArthur Lock was designed, contracted, built and opened to ships in just 13 or 14 months in 1943. A wartime project built in a wartime hurry, the then-new lock deepened the allowable draft of vessels using it from 23 1/2 feet to 33 feet and enabled the lock to handle vessels 76 feet wide and 740 feet in length.

None of the several navigation locks built in Sault Ste. Marie over the last 148 years was built in such short order.

Construction crews worked around the clock, 12 months of the year to complete the MacArthur on schedule. That work included pouring massive amounts of concrete included in the lock's monoliths and floors at temperatures that dipped into the minus 30-degree range the winter of 1942-'43.

By comparison, construction of the larger Poe Lock took five years on a conventional timetable.

For all the hurry in building the MacArthur, Jacek said the quality of concrete and the massive mechanical works incorporated into the structure remain the best of the four locks currently in existence. "It's still our best concrete and operating system," Jacek said of the MacArthur.

The lock operated for more than 50 years with few problems before its first major overhaul three years ago, a demonstration of the structure's unusual durability.

The second Corps ceremony set for June 28 will honor former Corps surveyor Bancroft Bufe, who worked on the MacArthur Project in '43, the new Corps powerhouse in 1952, the deepening of the St. Mary's River in the late 1950s and a bend widening project in the 1970s.

The Corps new survey vessel based at Sault Ste. Marie is named in honor of the late surveyor.

In addition to the flyover, band and expanded tours for Engineer's Day, an Army climbing wall will also be on display in Locks Park during the day on June 28.

Meanwhile, a short hop downriver from the Locks, Base Sault will be holding an open house of its own, spread over two days, Friday, June 27 and Saturday, June 28 at Base Sault on Water Street.

The Coast Guard open house runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Saturday. During the open house, public tours will be conducted of Base Sault's vessel traffic center, the icebreaking tug Katmai Bay and the buoy tender Buckthorn, as well as the several small patrol boats based in Sault Ste. Marie. Also on public display at the base for the occasion will be the new homeland security boat assigned to Station St. Ignace and a HH65 search and rescue helicopter from the Traverse City Air Station.

A number of booths will also be set up at the base to illustrate search and rescue, firefighting, marine pollution prevention and other Coast Guard missions. Public tours also include a display of electronic equipment used by the Coast Guard.

Coast Guard Auxiliary members will also be on hand with boating safety information.

In a statement, Group Sault said members of the public will also be try their hands with an interactive simulator of a boat taking on water. Adults and teens will be able to attempt to "save" the flooding boat.

Demonstrations include a life-jacket dunking tank, where a bull's eye on a target earns a Coast Guardsman a dunking.

For younger kids, a coloring contest will be held for children ten years old and under with \$200 in toys for prizes. Parents of young children can also have them fingerprinted by the communications center staff at Base Sault.

On both days of the June 27-28 weekend, visitors will be able to observe a demonstration rescue by rescue swimmers dropped by helicopter near a "drowning" victim.

Both Corps and Coast Guard events are open at no charge to the general public.

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